

**2** Blood Pressure Checks and Your Heart

**3** The Importance of Colorectal Cancer Screening

**4** Alcohol and Your Well-Being: How to Stay Healthy and Safe

**6** Winter Recipes

# healthwise

a PERS Health Insurance Program newsletter | Winter 2022



## Blood Pressure Checks and Your Heart

Blood pressure is a measure of how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries as it moves through your body. It goes up and down throughout the day. But if it stays up, you have high blood pressure, or hypertension.

When blood pressure is high, it causes damage to your blood vessel walls that gets worse over time. This increases your risk for heart disease, stroke, vision problems, and kidney damage.

A normal blood pressure for most adults is 120/80. The first, larger number is called systolic pressure. It measures the pressure when your heart is pumping and pushing out blood. The second, smaller number is the diastolic pressure. It measures the pressure when your heart is resting.

We don't know the exact cause of high blood pressure. But we know that some things are linked to it. These include aging, drinking too much alcohol, eating a lot of salt (sodium), being overweight, not exercising, using tobacco, and having family members with high blood pressure.

High blood pressure doesn't usually cause symptoms. Most people don't know they have it until they go to the doctor for some other reason. Your doctor may ask you to test it again when you are home.

A home blood pressure monitor makes it easy to keep track of your blood pressure. You can check your blood pressure at different times and in different places during the day.

Choose a monitor that goes around your upper arm. It is more accurate than a wrist monitor. Wrist monitors should be used only by people who can't use arm cuffs for physical reasons. Devices that use finger monitors aren't recommended at all.

There are models that measure blood pressure automatically. Others are manual and are used with a stethoscope. The

automatic kind has a cuff that inflates itself and is easier to use. Be sure your monitor's display is clear and easy for you to read.

When you first get a blood pressure device, check its accuracy. Do this by comparing its readings with those you get at the doctor's office. Ask a member of your health care team to watch you use yours to make sure that you are doing it right and that it works right. It's a good idea to have your device checked every year at your medical office.

### Before you take your blood pressure:

- Don't eat, smoke, or exercise for at least 30 minutes. And don't use any medicines that can raise blood pressure.
- Rest at least 5 minutes before you take a reading. Sit in a comfortable, relaxed position with both feet on the floor. Don't move or talk while you are measuring your blood pressure.
- Try not to take your blood pressure if you are nervous or upset.
- If you can, use the same arm for every reading. Readings can be 10–20 mm Hg different between your right arm and your left arm.

Keep a blood pressure diary. Your records may help explain any changes in your readings and help your doctor make sure you get the right treatment.

Record your readings with the date and time. You can use a paper journal or a spreadsheet on your computer. Your monitor might have a feature that will record your numbers for you. Some monitors can transfer this information to your computer.

Also make notes about your daily activities, such as the time you exercise or take medicine, or if you feel upset or feel stressed.

The two types of treatment for high blood pressure are lifestyle changes and medication. Your doctor may ask you to lose extra weight, eat less salt (sodium), and be more active. If these lifestyle changes don't help enough, you may also need to take daily medicines.

## The Importance of Colorectal Cancer Screening

Of cancers that affect both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Within the last year, the recommended ages for colorectal cancer screenings were expanded to 45 to 75.<sup>2</sup> With regular screenings, precancerous growths can be detected early, when treatment has the highest likelihood of success.<sup>3</sup>

There are several effective ways to be screened for colorectal cancer. Some screening options are completed in a doctor's office or medical facility, and other screenings can be completed in the comfort and convenience of your home.

### Stool Tests

- **Fecal occult blood test (FOBT):** This test is used to detect the presence of blood in your stool, which could be an indication of precancerous growths or colorectal cancer.
- **Fecal immunochemical test (FIT):** This test is used to detect the presence of blood in your stool.
- **FIT-DNA test:** This test is a combination of the FIT and screens for any altered DNA.

### Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

**Flexible sigmoidoscopy:** This screening is where a thin, flexible, lighted tube is used to check for polyps or cancer in the lower third section of the colon.

A heart-healthy lifestyle can help you prevent high blood pressure. These changes are even more important if you have risk factors for high blood pressure that you can't change, like age, race, and having others in your family who have high blood pressure.

*Courtesy of Kaiser Permanente*

### Colonoscopy

**Colonoscopy:** This screening checks the entire colon using a longer, thin, flexible, lighted tube. The main benefit of a colonoscopy is that it enables both colorectal cancer screening and polyp removal in a single procedure.

Speak with your primary care provider about which screening option is best for you, how often each screening should be completed, potential harms and benefits. When speaking with them about which test is right for you, consider the following:

- Your preferences.
- Your medical condition.
- Your personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps.
- The resources available for testing and follow-up.

Talk with your provider today and schedule your colorectal cancer screening.

References:

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Basic information about colorectal cancer. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved September 20, 2022, from [https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic\\_info/](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/colorectal/basic_info/)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Retrieved September 20, 2022, from <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/colorectal-cancer-screening>

<sup>3</sup> American Cancer Society. Colorectal Cancer Facts & Figures 2020-2022. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2020.

For more information on what services may be covered, please call your health plan.

*Courtesy of Moda Health*

# Alcohol and Your Well-Being: How to Stay Healthy and Safe

People drink alcohol for many reasons—to be sociable, to relax, or out of habit, to name a few. About two-thirds of older adults report they drink alcohol. If you're among this group, it's important to know the risks and guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

Alcohol use among older U.S. adults has been rising. From 2001 to 2013, the rate of alcohol use disorder in those age 65+ has gone up 107%.

## How much is too much?

The current U.S. guidelines:

- One (or fewer) drinks in a day for women
- Two (or fewer) drinks in a day for men

*Note: The guidelines above are not for everyone. You should avoid drinking if you have a health condition that can be made worse by alcohol. Also, don't drink if you're taking medications that interact with alcohol.*

A standard drink is defined as having 14 grams of alcohol. This is typically contained in:

- 12 oz. of beer
- 5 oz. of wine
- 1.5 oz. shot of distilled spirits

*Note: While the sizes above vary, they are equal in terms of the amount of alcohol they contain.*

## What are the dangers?

The dangers of drinking too much alcohol apply to all ages; however, the risks go up as we age. Older adults have an increased

sensitivity to the effects of alcohol. This is because their bodies process alcohol more slowly. Older women are at higher risk of these effects compared with older men.

## Physical and mental health

Drinking too much alcohol over a long time can lead to some kinds of cancer. Other negative effects include liver damage, immune system problems, and even brain damage. For those who already have certain health conditions, too much alcohol can make them worse. These include osteoporosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, ulcers, memory loss, and mood disorders. Dehydration is another concern for older adults who drink alcohol. This is partly due to changes in our sense of thirst, renal function, and body mass as we age.

## Safety

Even in small amounts, alcohol impairs judgment, coordination, and reaction times. This increases the risk of falls, household accidents, and car crashes. And because older adults have thinner bones, they are more likely to experience bone fractures from accidents.

The combination of alcohol and medicines is another safety consideration. It can be dangerous, or even fatal, to drink alcohol with certain prescriptions and even over-the-counter drugs. Before taking any medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist if you can safely drink alcohol.

## Learn more or get help

### Rethinking Drinking

Created by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Whether you're just starting to take a look at your drinking or have already decided to cut back or quit, this site offers helpful tools and research-based information.

[RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](https://RethinkingDrinking.niaaa.nih.gov)

## Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Professional help if you're feeling overwhelmed by depression, anxiety, or loneliness.

877-726-4727, TTY: 711

[SamhsaInfo@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:SamhsaInfo@samhsa.hhs.gov)

[Samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)

## Alcoholics Anonymous

A no-cost fellowship of alcoholics. Dedicated to sobriety and recovery through its spiritually inclined Twelve Steps program.

212-870-3400, TTY: 711

[AA.org](https://www.aa.org)

## References:

<https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/alcohol-use-among-older-adults>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5710229/>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/facts-about-aging-and-alcohol>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/rising-alcohol-use-among-older-adult-202109242599>

<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcoholism-treatment/elderly>

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders/older-adults>

Courtesy of PacificSource



If you have your PHIP premium automatically deducted each month, either by pension deduct or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), your premium will change beginning January 1.

For more information regarding your 2023 premiums, visit [pershealth.com](https://pershealth.com).



## Walk-Away Slow Cook Chicken

### Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken, 4-5 pounds
- 1 large onion
- 3 tablespoons combined of your favorite dried herbs/spices

### Directions

1. Rinse and dry chicken.
2. Roughly chop onion and place in bottom of slow-cooker.
3. Combine herbs and spices in a small bowl and gently rub on chicken.
4. Place chicken in slow-cooker on top of onions. Set on low for 8 hours.

### Notes

For a savory bird, add ½ a lemon in the cavity and choose spices such as thyme, sage and basil. For a Latin flair, use chili powder, cayenne pepper, paprika and cumin.

Cook once, eat twice: Save leftover chicken and broth for soup.

### Nutritional information (per serving)

Serving size: 3.5 ounces  
Number of servings: 4 plus leftovers

Calories	177
Total Fat	7g
Saturated Fat	2g
Cholesterol	83mg
Sodium	70mg
Total Carbohydrate	0g
Dietary Fiber	0g
Sugars	0g
Protein	27g

Source: Walk-Away Slow Cook Chicken on Food52  
Courtesy of Providence Health Assurance

## Very Veggie Chili

The smoky, complex flavor of this simple vegetarian chili comes from basic pantry ingredients, vegetables, and spices! It makes great leftovers, too.

### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil or avocado oil
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- 1 large red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 2 ribs celery, chopped
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- 4 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 ½ teaspoons smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 large can (28 ounces) or 2 small cans (15 ounces each) diced tomatoes

2 cans (15 ounces each) black beans, rinsed and drained

1 can (15 ounces) pinto beans, rinsed and drained

2 cups vegetable broth or water

1 bay leaf

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, plus more for garnishing

1 to 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar, red wine vinegar or lime juice, to taste

### Suggested toppings

Chopped cilantro

Sliced avocado

Tortilla chips

Sour cream or plain Greek yogurt

Grated cheddar cheese

### Directions

1. In a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, add olive oil. Add the chopped onion, bell pepper, carrot, celery and ¼ teaspoon of the salt. Stir to combine and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, and the onion is translucent, about 7 to 10 minutes.
2. Add the garlic, chili powder, cumin, smoked paprika and oregano. Cook until fragrant while stirring constantly, about 1 minute.
3. Add the diced tomatoes and their juices, the drained black beans and pinto beans, vegetable broth and bay leaf. Stir to combine and let the mixture come to a simmer. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally and reducing heat as necessary to maintain a gentle simmer, for 30 minutes.

4. Remove the chili from the heat and discard the bay leaf.
5. Add the chopped cilantro, stir to combine, and then mix in the vinegar or lime juice, to taste. Then, add salt to taste. Divide the mixture into individual bowls and serve with garnishes of your choice. This chili will keep well in the refrigerator for about four days, or you can freeze it for longer-term storage.

### Nutritional information (per serving)

Number of servings: 1 ½ cups  
Serving size: 6

Calories	236
Total Fat	6.4g
Saturated Fat	0.9g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	1071.8mg
Total Carbohydrate	37.6g
Dietary Fiber	10.3g
Sugars	7.6g
Protein	10.9g

Source: Cookie and Kate  
Courtesy of Moda Health



P.O. Box 40187  
Portland, OR 97240-0187



**PERS Health Insurance Program (PHIP)**

**[pershealth.com](http://pershealth.com)**  
(503) 224-7377  
(800) 768-7377  
TTY: 711  
Fax: (503) 765-3452 or (888) 393-2943